

REMARKS

I. Summary of the Office Action

Claims 1 and 10-39 were pending in the above-identified patent application.

Claims 1, 10, 14-19, 21-25, 29, 30, 33-35, 38, and 39 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious from Brian et al. U.S. Patent No. 5,548,345 (hereinafter "Brian") in view of Gilboy U.S. Patent No. 5,465,113 (hereinafter "Gilboy"). Claims 11-13, 20, 25-28, 31, 32, 36, and 37 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious from Brian in view of Gilboy and West et al. U.S. Patent No. 5,550,575 (hereinafter "West").

II. Applicants' Reply

Applicants have amended claims 1, 15-21, 23, 26, 27, 29, 31, 33, and 34-39 to more particularly define the subject matter of the claimed invention. The amendments are fully supported by the application as filed and do not add new matter.

The Examiner's rejections are respectfully traversed.

A. Independent Claims 1, 27, 29, 31, and 38

Applicants' independent claims 1, 27, 29, 31, and 38 are generally directed toward methods and apparatus for exercising access control over a television program using a parental control user interface having different functions that are available to a user in a master mode of operation. A password is input for entering into the master mode for obtaining access to the functions of the parental control user interface. A criterion is entered for blocking a television program from being viewed or recorded and a criterion is entered for overriding a blocked television program to be viewed or recorded. One or more programs are

selected for viewing or recording. The user not in the master mode is prompted to enter the password if the selected programs meet the blocking criterion and do not meet the overriding criterion. If the user enters the password responsive to the prompt, the selected programs that meet the blocking criterion and do not meet the overriding criterion are unblocked so they can be viewed or recorded.

Applicants' claimed approach advantageously provides parental access control mechanisms that may be used to fine-tune the operation of access control devices such as the V-Chip to suit particular user preferences (see page 8, lines 17-35 of applicants' specification). As illustrated in FIG. 1, a user may block programs enabled by the V-Chip to prevent these programs from being viewed or recorded. Alternatively or additionally, the user may override programs blocked by the V-Chip so that these programs may be viewed or recorded. Applicants' claimed invention also permits the user to quickly gain access to blocked programs by entering a password in response to a prompt.

Brian refers to a viewing supervision system that allows a user to preprogram the hours, programs and/or channels that are allowed or blocked for viewing.

Gilboy refers to a programmable cable controller that allows a viewer to limit the total viewing time of a cable television channel during given time periods. To prevent unauthorized changes to the channel timers, Gilboy requires the viewer to enter a password in order to making changes to the channel timer.

The Examiner contends that Brian and Gilboy, in combination, disclose all the features of applicants' independent claims 1, 29, and 38. The Examiner also contends that Brian, Gilboy, and West, in combination,

disclose all features of applicants' independent claims 27 and 31. In particular, the Examiner states that Brian discloses "entering a first, second and third criterion (Supervisor or Parent enters different viewing modes[:] supervis[ed] viewing or recording, full access, programs modes) for blocking a television program from being viewed or recorded [and] overriding a blocked television program." See Office Action, page 3, lines 6-10. The Examiner also contends that the combination of Brian and Gilboy teaches prompting the user not in the master mode to enter a password if the selected programs meet the blocking criterion but do not meet the overriding criterion and unblocking the selected plurality of programs if the user enters the password in response to the prompt, as specified in independent claims 1, 27, 29, 31, and 38. See Office Action, page 3, line 20 to page 4, line 15. Applicants respectfully disagree.

First, the Examiner appears to be erroneously comparing the viewing modes in Brian with applicants' criteria for blocking and overriding (see Office Action, page 3, lines 6-7). Viewing modes and criteria for blocking and overriding are at least functionally distinct. In particular, viewing modes in Brian are modes of operation that enable or restrict system functionalities available to the user depending on which viewing mode is selected (see, e.g., Brian column 7, lines 30-65). For example, if operating in program mode, unit 10 of Brian permits the user to specify TV viewing times, channels, and programs to be blocked for a viewer watching the television in supervised mode. However, this programming functionality is not available in supervised mode and the user of Brian's unit 10 cannot enter criteria to, for example, enable the programming functionality in supervised mode. Applicants'

criteria, on the other hand, may be entered by the user and may be used to determine which programs are to be blocked or unblocked, without restricting available system functionalities. For example, as shown in applicant's FIG. 26, a user may specify that channel 22 be blocked on July 4, from 10:00PM until midnight. It is, therefore, clear that Brian's viewing modes are not interchangeable with applicants' criteria for blocking and unblocking programs available for viewing or recording.

Second, contrary to the Examiner's contention, Brian and Gilboy, taken individually or in combination, fail to teach or suggest at least entering a criterion for overriding a blocked television program so that it may be viewed or recorded, as specified in applicants' claims 1, 27, 29, 31, and 38. Although Brian makes references to providing the user with the option to block or allow selected programs, Brian does not show or suggest that a user may enter a criterion for unblocking programs that would otherwise be blocked.

Third, Brian and Gilboy also fail to teach or suggest (1) prompting a user not in the master mode to enter a password if a selected one or more programs meet the blocking criterion and do not meet the overriding criterion, and (2) unblocking selected programs that meet a blocking criterion and do not meet an overriding criterion if the user enters the password in response to the prompt, as also specified in applicants' independent claims 1, 27, 29, 31, and 38. The Examiner concedes that Brian fails to teach this feature. However, the Examiner relies on Gilboy to make up this deficiency in Brian. Regarding Gilboy, the Examiner contends that Gilboy "prompts each user before and during TV viewing in order to prevent unauthorized changes to a channel timer." See Office Action, page 4 lines 6-11.

Applicants respectfully disagree. Although Gilboy requires a password when a user attempts to make changes to a channel timer, Gilboy fails to teach or suggest (1) prompting the user to enter a password if one or more selected programs meet a blocking criterion and do not meet an overriding criterion, and (2) allowing the user to view or record a blocked program in response to entering the password, as taught by applicants.

For at least the foregoing reasons, applicants respectfully submit that independent claims 1, 27, 29, 31, and 38 are allowable over the prior art of record. Each of claims 10-26, 28, 30, and 32 is allowable for at least the reason that it depends from an allowable independent claim.

B. Independent Claim 33

Applicants' independent claim 33 is directed toward a method of exercising access control over a television using a parental control user interface having different functions that are available to a user in a master mode of operation. A password is input for entering into the master mode for obtaining access to the functions of the parental control user interface. A criterion is entered for unblocking a blocked television program to be viewed or recorded. A plurality of programs are selected for viewing or recording. The selected plurality of programs are unblocked if they are blocked television programs that meet the unblocking criterion.

As discussed in detail under Section II-A above, Brian and Gilboy fail to teach or suggest at least entering a criterion for unblocking television programs that would otherwise be blocked from viewing or recording.

For at least the foregoing reason, applicants respectfully submit that independent claim 33 is allowable over Brian and Gilboy.

C. Independent Claims 34, 36 and 39

Independent claims 34, 36, and 39 are generally directed toward methods and an apparatus of exercising access control over a television using a parental control user interface having different functions that are available to a user in a master mode of operation. A password is received for entering into the master mode for obtaining access to the functions of the parental control user interface. A first criterion is stored for blocking television programs from being viewed or recorded based on stored information relating to the television programs. A second criterion is stored for unblocking television programs that are blocked by the first criterion for blocking from being viewed or recorded. A user selection is received for a program for viewing or recording. If the selected program meets both the first criterion for blocking and the second criterion for unblocking, the selected program is unblocked so it can be viewed or recorded.

As discussed in detail under Section II-A above, Brian and Gilboy fail to teach or suggest at least storing a second criterion for unblocking television programs that are blocked by a first criterion for blocking from being viewed or recorded. Brian and Gilboy also fail to teach or suggest unblocking a selected program that is blocked by the first criterion for viewing or recording, if the selected program meets the second criterion for unblocking, as specified in applicants' claims 34, 36, and 39.

For at least the foregoing reason, applicants respectfully submit that independent claims 34, 36, and 39

are allowable over the prior art of record. Each of claims 35 and 37 is allowable for at least the reason that it depends from an allowable independent claim.

III. Conclusion

For at least the reasons discussed above, applicants submit that this application, as amended, is in condition for allowance. Prompt consideration and allowance are therefore respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,



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